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Increasing interest over the last twenty years in quality Greek and Latin translations seems to be primarily a reflection of the "paperback revolution." Figures and trend reports from various publishers illustrate the burgeoning numbers of classical works in translation. This new availability has enabled students of literature, history, political science, and the sciences to be aware of the classical antecedents of their individual disciplines. There is an additional need for 1-volume anthologies of Greek and Roman selections which would elucidate the roots of knowledge in each subject area. (AF)

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## CLASSICS IN TRANSLATION*

A significant development in classical studies during the last two decades has resulted from the greater availability and use of Greek and Latin works in English translations. Through this medium, students in all academic disciplines are becoming increasingly acquainted with classical literature. "I've never been very good in Latin," said one youth realistically, "but it's introduced me to the *Aeneid*, and now I want to read it in English." A number of others who have never studied the original languages are becoming converts to the classics through "classics in translation" courses, which often motivate, in turn, the study of Latin or Greek. Courses which make extensive use of such texts are taught not only in the department of Classical Languages and Literatures but in any of a number of other departments such as English, Comparative Literature, Humanities, Great Books, and General Studies. In addition to literature classes in secondary schools and colleges, many subjects like History, Political Science, and Philosophy use translations as required or collateral reading.

With the aid of translations, students in various fields can now more fully comprehend the relevance of the great works of Greece and Rome to the modern world: those studying literature find them to be the sources of countless allusions; students of history and political science discover the fundamental principles which influenced the United States Constitution stated succinctly in the *Histories* of Polybius; majors in science recognize the significance of Epicurus' atomic theories as explained in Lucretius' *The Nature of the Universe.*

The impact of the "paperback revolution" has been much discussed in recent years, but the specific effect of the increased availability of inexpensive translations of classics has not been examined in detail. A survey of publishing houses conducted by this writer in the spring of 1967 revealed some interesting information. Fifty-nine of 125 publishers, or 48 percent, answered the letters of inquiry. Unfortunately some were unable to disclose data on quantities of publication or sale, but many others either supplied meaningful statistics or made valuable general statements. Although the replies indicate that translations still represent a relatively minor proportion of the total offerings of large commercial houses, such works form a significantly larger percentage of the output of university presses. Moreover, some firms which do not offer classics in translation do publish literary criticism of classical works.

To some extent, of course, the clothbound anthologies traditionally used in college classes have continued to play a substantial role, showing consistent sales over the past several decades, despite a decrease since 1950. A widely used one-volume selection of Greek and Latin literary masterpieces in English has sold over 35,000 copies during the past twenty years, and a like number in the two-volume series has been marketed.

Although partly attributable to the recent surge in publications of all types, the growth of interest in quality Greek and Latin translations appears to be primarily a reflection of the "paperback revolution." For example, in the first annual listing of inexpensive translations appearing in *The Classical Weekly* of January 1950, only 72 titles were available. In two years that number more than doubled, and by 1960 more than three and a half times the titles were available. The comparable list published in January 1968 by the same magazine (renamed *The Classical World)* contained 532 works — a gain of over 630 percent in 18 years. The increase during this decade has been steady, as indicated in the table below:

INEXPENSIVE CLASSICS IN TRANSLATION*

| Year | Available |
|---|---|
| 1949-1950 | 72 |
| 1953-1954 | 157 |
| 1957-1958 | 221 |
| 1959-1960 | 265 |
| 1961-1962 | 314 |
| 1962-1963 | 395 |
| 1963-1964 | 434 |
| 1964-1965 | 477 |
| 1965-1966 | 494 |
| 1966-1967 | 518 |
| 1967-1968 | 532 |

Most publishers responding to the survey indicated that their output has found a good market, with Greek and Roman epics proving particularly popular. In fact, approximately a dozen translations each of the *Iliad, Odyssey* and *Aeneid* are available. One version of the *Aeneid* more than doubled in sales during the ten-year period between 1956 and 1966; its accumulated sales since publication now top 260,000 copies. Retail purchases of a well known translation of the *Odyssey* have increased in even more

*An exhaustive list of inexpensive classics in translation has been published annually since 1950 by this journal. For the current list edited by Prof. Ursula Schoenheim, see the issue of January 1968.

*Source: annual list published in *The Classical World* (formerly *The Classical Weekly*).

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spectacular fashion, not quite doubling since its first publication less than four years ago and compiling a total volume of almost 200,000 copies. Indicative of the *Odyssey's* perennial appeal is the fact that another publisher during a twenty year period issued almost two and a half million copies in 28 printings! Similarly, a university press reported that its paperback edition of the *Iliad,* which sells over 50,000 copies annually, has been recording a consistent annual increase of approximately 4,000 copies.

Classical drama in translation also has wide appeal. For example, more than 25,000 copies of one softbound anthology of Greek tragedy are sold each year, with annual increases averaging 3,000. Other distribution figures are equally impressive: a volume of the plays of Aeschylus shows current sales in excess of 25,000 in 1966, an increase of 5,000 over 1965; a volume of Sophocles' plays, 20,000 in 1966 with an increase of 5,000 in each of the past three years; Euripides' plays, over 5,000, increasing about 1,000 per year. A separate printing of Sophocles' Theban plays published by another company in 1966 had already sold 3,000 copies by the end of the year. Greek comedy sells almost as well as tragedy; one publisher reported that sales of an edition of Aristophanes were approximately 7,000 copies a year for the past ten years, and individual editions of the *Lysistrata* are equally popular. A recently published group of Plautus' plays has been averaging about half this sales total.

While translations of prose works have not appealed, in general, to as wide a public as those of poetry, philosophical works by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius show good marketability. As is true also in the case of poetry, the number of inexpensive editions of Greek prose in English far out-number those available for Latin authors. The reader may choose from over 50 editions of Plato, each containing a translation of one or more dialogues. One company has printed almost two million copies of a selection of Plato's dialogues since its issuance ten years ago. Likewise, works of Greek and Roman historians (e.g. Herodotus, Thucydides, Caesar, Livy, and Tacitus) have shown a sustained demand, whether in separate editions or in volumes of selections. A version of Cicero's *Republic* had average sales of 6,000 or more copies a year throughout a five year period, and a book of Aesop's fables has sold 11,000 copies since 1960.

Moreover, in many cases even those classics whose total annual sales is comparatively low (1,000 to 1,500 volumes) have shown a steady 50 percent increase over the last three years, according to one university press. A book of Sappho's lyric poems has had good sales, while a translation of Catullus' poems is said by another university press to be its best selling classics paperback. On the other hand, the appeal of volumes by lesser-known authors like Bacchylides and Theocritus remains relatively low. Indeed, an unfortunate side effect of the "paperback revolution" was noted by several publishers: the replacement of hard cover anthologies by individual soft cover works often means that many students never come into contact with a number of the less famous authors of antiquity. The result is that a few of the great epics and plays tend to be studied to the exclusion of the passages from minor classical writers which were formerly included in classroom volumes.

It is certainly understandable that the general public, becoming acquainted for the first time with the classics through translations, may be attracted mainly to familiar titles. Of course it is also true that many elementary courses in the original Greek and Latin have traditionally concentrated on such authors as Homer, Plato, Caesar, Cicero and Vergil. Only recently have the textbooks used in these classes begun to include less familiar but perhaps quite as valuable selections from other writers.

Interestingly enough, a book often sells better during its first year of publication, especially if there has not been a recent translation of the work. Part of the reason for this, at least, can be traced to early demand for copies by teachers and classical scholars. Sales may then drop off in the second or third year, but if it is a competent translation and fills a real classroom need, the demand soon rises again. Local situations such as the production of a Greek or Latin play may also cause a temporary period of high turnover for an individual translation.

Since many of the titles analyzed here were not published until the 1960's, it is still somewhat early to draw any firm conclusions about trends. Most of the publishers surveyed, however, indicated that the introduction of paperback classics has been accompanied by consistently higher sales. Furthermore it is to be presumed that the increased availability of good translations in inexpensive form will also lead to the design and offering by schools of more courses built around them, which in turn will bring even greater demand. This is especially true because such classes ordinarily require the reading

of a half dozen or more books in place of the former comprehensive anthology.

It is to be hoped that the present output of translations based largely upon a relatively small number of authors will be broadened to include a greater variety in the future. That a few lesser known authors, both Greek and Latin, are being translated each year is an auspicious sign. However, there is still a lack of paperback editions of a number of individual works such as Hesiod, *The Works and Days;* Nepos, *Lives;* a wider selection of Cicero's letters; Phaedrus' fables; the *Res Gestae* of Augustus; Ovid's *Tristia* and *Fasti;* Seneca's essays and letters; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* (of interest for content if not for style).

In addition, considering the needs of undergraduates and general readers, the potential of one type of publication, particularly full of possibilities, has not been adequately exploited. Students in various fields should have easy access to the classical sources pertinent to their disciplines. Thus there is a real necessity for one-volume anthologies of selections from Greek and Roman authors which throw light upon the roots of knowledge in each particular subject-matter area such as mathematics, natural science, social science, etc. For example, those studying the history of science, a field which is now being explored with heightened interest, could use an anthology of excerpts from Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Aristotle, Archimedes, Galen, Lucretius, and Pliny the Elder, to mention a few. Scholars specializing in the history of political theory have long found rich resources in the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero: a compilation including selective translations from these authors along with Pericles' funeral oration from Thucydides, the Old Oligarch on the Athenian Constitution and Polybius' comments on the desirability of a mixed constitution from the *Histories* would be invaluable to the less specialized reader.

Excellent translations of classical epics, drama, lyric poetry, etc., which have been appearing with increasing frequency, have been a revelation to students of comparative literature by helping them to understand the antecedents of characters, plots, themes, and allusions which hitherto were obscure to them. Still more effort should be expended along this line to clarify the development of other literary genres. A collection in a single volume of classical satires from such originators of this literary form as Horace, Persius, Martial, Juvenal, Petronius, and Lucian would aid significantly the understanding of the works of Pope, Swift, and others. Those interested in the history of biographical writing would find similarly illuminating representative passages from Nepos, Sallust, Quintus Curtius, Plutarch, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Arrian. Brief introductions like these to the wealth of classical sources would benefit the ordinary student seeking a broad background in the classics and, at the same time, would serve as preliminary reading in the field for those planning more advanced study.

In general, although a few source books in inexpensive form, showing antecedents of a particular discipline, are available in certain fields, especially history, philosophy, and drama, a larger, more comprehensive selection would be very desirable. Certainly it seems evident from this study that there is likely to be a steady and growing interest in translations, both individual works and anthologies, which are not only accurate but qualify as literature. In fact, publishers even now are evincing an active desire to expand their lists of titles to fill this demand. Classicists should respond with their best efforts, for in doing so, they will find translation an excellent method of keeping alive the classical tradition.

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